

4th Grade Student Essay Contest – “This Place Matters”

For the 2019 Archaeology & Historic Preservation Month, the South Dakota State Historical Society sponsored a statewide essay contest for all students in the 4th grade, the year in which South Dakota history is taught. The purpose was to enable students to achieve a better appreciation of their historic resources, the stories they tell, and why they should be maintained.

Students were asked to write a 100-400 word essay using this year’s theme of “This Place Matters.” It could be about any South Dakota location that is at least 50 years old, why it is a favorite place for them, and why it should be saved. It did not need to be a historic site.

Fifty-eight entries were received. The participants were from 15 towns, 14 schools, and three home schools. Entries were judged on quality of writing, content and theme, and originality of thought. The names of the winners and copies of their essays, as submitted, are below.

The first-place winner was Kendal Waltner from Tea Area Legacy Elementary School.

Kendal won a \$200 cash prize and a one-year family membership to the South Dakota State Historical Society valued at \$50.



*Click on image to view larger.
Image courtesy of City of Sioux Falls.*

“Out of the Park”

Sherman Park in Sioux Falls, SD

What is your favorite park? Is it one that has a zoo, a battle ship memorial, and nine softball fields? If so, you must like Sherman Park like I do. Although there is so much to do there, the thing I love most are the incredible softball fields.

In March of 1910, Edwin A. Sherman and his wife Katherine donated 52 acres of land to Sioux Falls. This land is located in the northern part of Sioux Falls, SD near the big Sioux river. Then in October of 1910, the city of Sioux Falls accepted the land and made it into a park. Over the next fifty years things came and went but then in 1969, my beloved fast-pitch softball fields came to be. Over the next years more fields were added bringing the total to nine fields. In 1994, the South Dakota Softball Hall of Fame came to Sherman Park.

Sherman Park is special to me and my family because my dad, my papa, and my great grandpa all played softball there. I love that I can go and sit in the stands, and look out on the field and think that three generations on my dad’s side of the family have all played on those fields. I hope that someday I will play there just like my dad, papa, and great grandpa all have. Maybe someday I could make it in the Sioux Falls Softball Hall of Fame just like my great grandpa did.

This place should be preserved because there are so many family memories waiting to happen. I can remember over 20 and I have only been going there for 2 years. It is an outstanding place to visit. Future generations should get a chance to enjoy it.



Click on image to view larger.
Image courtesy of Mellette Memorial Assn.

Brynn Roehrich from Clark Elementary School took second place.

Brynn won a \$100 cash prize and a one-year family membership to the South Dakota State Historical Society.

**“This Place Matters”
Mellette House, Watertown, SD**

I close my eyes and think;

Wouldn't it be fun to climb the massive circular staircase, which ascends from the ground floor through the second story to the small tower room located on the 3rd floor and then ride the circular bannister down? (This what the tour guide told me she did as a dare when she was in high school.)

Or wouldn't it be fun to tighten the rope strings on the bed with the bedbug wrench? I realize the saying, “Slip tight don't let the bedbugs bite” came from. Each night they had to tighten the ropes on the bed before sleeping on it. If the bedbug wrench was used wrong, it would pinch their fingers! (This bed is on display on the second floor.)

Wouldn't it be fun to walk down the back stairs (maid stairs) to get to the kitchen to cook a meal for the 1st Governor of South Dakota or host a tea party with Mrs. Mellette and 100 women using the old wooden cook stove? (This is located on the main floor.)

Wouldn't it be fun to wear a ball gown and dance in the double parlor where fancy parties and political gatherings were held? I could picture myself twirling around as the organ played. (This is located on the main floor.)

Wouldn't it be fun to play with the Mellette boy's toys? Their favorite was the “Jacobs Ladder.” (Well, I know it is because I bought one at the gift shop.)

I open my eyes and realized “This Place Matters!!” This is the Mellette House built by Arthur Calvin Mellette and his wife, Margaret Wylie Mellette and their four sons in 1885 on Prospect Hill in Watertown, SD.

Every year my Grandma takes my cousins and me to the Mellette House. I never get tired of going there because I learn something new every year.

The house is furnished with original furniture, personal pictures, paintings and even Governor Mellette and Mrs. Mellette's clothes.

I LOVE touring this beautiful historic house. I hope they continue to work to preserve the Mellette House, so I can keep going there every year! Maybe some year, I can take my grandchildren there.

The Mellette House – This Place Matters!!

Winning third place was Amelia Duncan, home schooled in Aberdeen.

Kyla won a \$50 cash prize and a one-year family membership to the South Dakota State Historical Society.



**“The Perfect Example of South Dakota Beauty”
My Grandpa Woehlhaff’s farm near Eureka, SD, known as the RNA Lodge**

*Click on image to view larger.
Image courtesy of RNA Lodge.*

My favorite place is my Grandpa’s farm, which is in a beautiful valley near Eureka, SD. When we drive towards the farm we get excited as we start to see a glittering pond. It is not just any pond, but it is a Federal Wildlife Refuge. We see trees with yellow-green leaves that look like they are saying “hi.” As we come up over the hill, we begin to see the farm in the valley that is my favorite place.

In 1958, when my Grandpa was only four years old, he moved to the farm with his family. They worked hard raising cows and hogs. They made their living farming corn, soybeans, sunflowers, barley, and oats. Grandpa, his brother, and his sister had to walk almost half a mile up the high hill to get to the school bus in all weather. During blizzards, Great Grandpa would tie a rope from the barn to the house so he wouldn’t get lost. Despite hardships, they never gave up. Now, this farm has been made into a hunting lodge owned by my Grandpa and his siblings. It attracts lots of visitors. I am thankful for the work they put into making their farm enjoyable for future generations.

This farm is not only beauty and history, it is fun too. I like to go four wheeling on the farm. We see lots of animals such as coyotes and pheasants. My brothers, two cousins, and I like to run up and down hills, catching frogs. We jump off a big rock that a long time ago Grandpa and I names “The thinking Rock.” But the best part is looking for “treasures.” Sometimes the treasures are belt buckles, sometimes they are tools. Maybe one day we will find Great Grandma’s lost wedding ring.

Congratulations Kendal, Brynn, and Amelia!